

The Starlight Kids Mystery of the Feather Burglar

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The Starlight Kids: Mystery of the Feather Burglar

Who is that strange man packing boxes late at night in the attic across the street? Why didn't the home attendant want any kids visiting Mrs. Broderick? Shari was determined to find out. With the help of her new friends and the new Starlight Kids Club, Shari gets her chance to turn a boring summer vacation into a fantastic action packed adventure.

Books by Olive Peart

Linked

They were so similar and they lived in the same imperfect world with overwhelming family problems. Each boy, in his own way, was begging for help. One was black and the other was white and they had switched!

The Intruders

What does a black, a Chinese, an Italian and a Puerto Rican have in common? A thirst for excitement! The Bronx teens get this and more when they time-travel into the future and an adventure of a lifetime. All goes well until they are forced to take sides in a tribal battle. This was no longer fun. This was war!

Chapter 1

"Shari, why not go outside?" her mother asked.

Shari was lounging on the sofa, watching the kids from her block as they played on the street.

"I don't want to go outside. I don't know any of the kids out there."

Her mother stood up from unpacking another box of knickknacks. "If you don't want to go outside you may as well help me unpack some more of these things."

Shari scowled. Her mother was probably feeling guilty since she had no friends here. "But Mom! That's not fair. I already unpacked all the things for my room."

"Well, I have the entire house to sort out. And I don't need to watch you roaming about the house like a lost soul."

"If we didn't move, we wouldn't have to do any unpacking."

"Don't start this argument again, Shari." Her mother's voice was raised, a sure indication that she was angry.

Shari turned away. "I'll go outside," she muttered. Maybe those kids could explain what she had seen last night. It was so weird. Why would anyone keep so much money in their house? Maybe she and her mom had moved in right next to crooks. It would serve her mother right!

If only she could wake up and find that the last few months hadn't happened. She had been so looking forward to the summer holidays. Beach trips with her friends, picnics, camp ... Now everything was all messed up. She was in a strange city with no friends and no family.

As soon as she stepped outside, Shari realized her mistake. She had nothing to play with but she didn't want to go back in. They would think she was afraid or something. Already, they were all staring at her. The kids had been playing hopscotch on the sidewalk next to her house. There were six children, three boys and three girls. The only non-black, a boy, had a deep tan and curly dark blond hair with brown eyes. Two of the girls wore skirts and blouses. What's wrong with them? Imagine playing hopscotch in a skirt! All the other children wore what Shari considered standard summer wear - shorts and T-shirts. She sat on the last step of her stoop and watched them. They continued playing,

occasionally glancing in her direction. At the end of the game one of the older girls called out to her.

"Want to play?" The girl was a bit chubby for her size, with brown eyes and short black hair. Her hair was combed into about a dozen separate braids. Like Shari, her complexion was coffee brown. She was one of the girls in a skirt and blouse.

Shari nodded and stood. The game couldn't be any different from what she and her friends played out in California.

"We live next to you," another of the girls said. She was about average size, with a light complexion. Her hair was about the same length as Shari's - reaching just below her shoulders. But while Shari's hair was relaxed - a rubber clasp held it in a ponytail - this girl's hair was combed into three thick braids.

"Oh. You are Indy Parens then, right?" Mr. and Mrs. Parens were Shari's new neighbors. The Parens had introduced themselves to Shari and her mother the evening before. Shari remembered Mrs. Parens talking about her three children.

"Uh-huh," the girl nodded. "And there's Shawn...and Rosad, my other brother," she pointed to two boys; both had the same complexion as their sister. The Parens' children, the two older ones, looked relatively tidy, but Rosad looked more or less as if he had been in a fight, his clothes were so rumpled and soiled.

"Shawn and Indy are twins," the third girl spoke up. Like the first speaker she too was chubby and had her hair combed into many short braids. She also wore a neat skirt and blouse.

"You don't look alike," Shari looked at Shawn and Indy. Shawn's eyes were a lighter brown than Indy's and he was taller and looked skinny, even in comparison to Indy's average size.

"That's 'cause we're fraternal twins," Shawn

explained. "Fraternal means... "

"I know what fraternal means," Shari interrupted.

"...It just means that two eggs came out instead of one," Shawn ignored the interruption. "So we're really just like a normal brother and sister."

Shari ignored him. "Are you twins too?" She asked turning to the other girls.

"No. Melody and I are just sisters," the older girl answered. "But we're only one year apart. I'm twelve and she's eleven."

"Al is eleven too," Indy explained. "Shawn and I are almost twelve and Rosad," she pointed to her younger brother, "is almost nine. Melissa is the oldest," she added.

"I am twelve too," Shari pointed out. In California she was the leader of her group of friends. She so missed her friends!

"Are we going to play, or what?" Al demanded.

"Al is an only child," Shawn said, "That's why he never learned to wait."

Everyone looked at Al. His T-shirt advertised a vacation in Puerto Rico. He grinned, "Yes... *Si...* *Si...* I don't have any brother or sister to bother me. I'm the one and only Al Ruiz." He gave a small bow then flicked his head back, causing his jumbled blond curls to appear even more ruffled. "And I still say, let's play," he continued.

They all laughed.

"It's my turn." Rosad shouted.

"You were the last one to play." Shawn protested.

"We can give him another chance since he's the youngest," Al suggested.

"He is not a baby. He should wait his turn." Shawn was insistent. "Everybody babies him. That's why he's so spoiled."

"Awwww... Come on Shawn," Indy reasoned. "It won't hurt just this once."

Shawn mouthed the word, "Baby" at Rosad.

"I'm not a baby!" Rosad yelled.

Seeing that the quarrel was about to escalate, Shari gave Rosad a gentle push. "Go ahead, Rosad. Take your turn."

Rosad stuck his tongue out at Shawn. To Shari's surprise, Shawn ignored him. The game continued.

Shari soon found she was wrong about the rules. Within a short time she and Melissa were arguing. "You can't jump on that square," she objected as Melody started hopping.

"We always play it like this." Melissa said. "Right, Shawn?" she turned for confirmation.

Shawn shrugged, "We agreed Melissa would set the rules. She's the oldest."

"Well that's not how you play the game." Shari repeated. "And I'm twelve too."

"It doesn't matter. This isn't the Olympics," Indy said. "Let's just play and quit arguing."

"But you can't play like that," Shari protested.

"I don't care about that. We're just having fun, see?" Al was impatient. "Stop arguing and play. Mami is going to call me in soon."

Shari gave in. She knew there was no way the others would listen to her instead of Melissa. She was the stranger, yet despite her misgiving about making friends with Melissa, she was beginning to enjoy herself until Al asked.....

"You're an only child too, right?"

"No," Shari said rudely.

There was silence as the others looked at her but she made no effort to fill the uncomfortable gap. She abruptly backed away. "I gotta go." With that Shari turned and ran back inside her house.

Her mother met her at the door. "Well, how did it go?"

"Awful!" Shari burst into tears. "I hate these kids and I hate this place." She ran up to her new room, and flopped down on the bed and cried and cried ... for her brothers ... her dad ... her friends ... all left behind in California. She was gradually aware that her mother was sitting on her bed patting her head.

"Leave me alone," she shouted burying her face in her pillow. "It's all your fault."

"Shari..." her mother tried.

Shari covered her ears. "I don't want to hear anything from you. I don't want to hear anything." She heard her mother sigh then felt a final pat on her head.

"I love you, Shari," Ms. Gibson said before walking out.

Shari shouted that she wasn't hungry when her mother called her for lunch. She was just too upset with her mother right now. She spent the rest of the evening looking out the bedroom window - watching the kids play-and wondering what they said when she walked off. They really weren't awful like she told her mother. In fact, she now wished that she hadn't rushed off. When the other kids finally went inside, she carefully noted their individual homes.

This was the northern section of the Bronx, New York and the area was mostly residential. All the houses on the block were detached duplexes, but there were two types. The bigger ones had a detached garage at the back of the houses, and bigger lots. The smaller ones, like her mother's, had an attached garage in the front of the house. Her mother's house was in the middle of the block. Shari already knew that Shawn, Indy and Rosad lived next door to the right. Their house was one of

the bigger duplexes. She now watched Al go to his house. He lived in one of the smaller houses, across the street opposite Shawn's house. Melissa and Melody lived to Al's left. Their home too, was a small duplex.

The house just across from her house was where she had seen the man and woman counting money the night before. Shari wondered if they were the owners. The house looked neglected on the outside. It was one of the smaller houses just like her mother's, but it was the only house on the block that looked in need of a paint job.

Because the block was not very long and was a dead-end, the street was now quiet. It really was a lovely block, with the tree-lined sidewalk giving residents a degree of privacy and providing a shady covering for the street. Leaves blocked her view of the upper windows of the houses across the street. Through a break in the leaves, the only windows Shari could see belonged to the house directly across from hers. The blinds on the lower level of the house were drawn but a faint light shone through the windows. That light was the only indication that the house was occupied.

She soon lost interest in the houses. She didn't know what to do but stubbornly refused to go downstairs. Her computer wasn't set up yet and she didn't even have a TV to watch. Her mother had brought only two television sets with them, one she had placed in the living room and the other in the master bedroom. Shari finally unpacked her cards and began playing Solitaire, then a few pretend games, just to amuse herself.

"Shari! Are you coming down for dinner?" Her mother was calling.

Dinnertime! Finally! Shari didn't want to go, but she was starving. Slowly, she made her way down the stairs. Her mother had prepared a huge

meal. Shari felt guilty. She hadn't helped in the preparation ... but it was not her fault. Her mother should have called her to help. She sat silently at the table.

Throughout dinner Shari spoke only when asked a question and even then her answers were in monosyllables or mutters. Halfway through the meal her mother gave up. At first Shari was pleased with her performance - she had forced her mother to give up trying to keep a conversation going. But as the uncomfortable silence wore on, she fidgeted in her seat, glancing occasionally at her mother, hoping she would say something ... anything. Her mother did not. Shari hurriedly finished eating, and since her mother didn't suggest that she wash the dishes, she excused herself and ran upstairs.

Shari spent a boring evening in her room. Later as she prepared for bed, she heard a car driving up the block. Shari looked out the window. A blue car pulled up in front of the house across from her. Shari felt a thrill of excitement as an automatic garage door slowly opened. Maybe now she would find out more about the couple she had seen. But the windows of the car were darkly tinted, and as the car drove in she was unable to see the driver.

Disappointed, Shari watched the house. No one came out; nothing happened. She was about to turn away from her window when a light came on upstairs. The windows still had no blinds and Shari watched, with mounting excitement, as the same man and woman from the night before appeared. This time they were not counting any money. They seemed to be removing things from the room and packing them into a box or something. Shari tried to see more of the room this time. Last night she had been so shocked when she saw the amount of money they had, she hadn't noticed anything else.

The room seemed a mess. There was stuff all

over the place. But what were they doing? It was impossible to see. What she needed was a pair of binoculars. She was about to move away in disappointment when the man grabbed the woman. They hugged and kissed each other. Shari couldn't watch any longer. She felt extremely embarrassed. She turned away and hopped into her bed. A few minutes later curiosity drove her to the window again. The room was in darkness. Now she was sorry she had moved away. As she again began turning away, she heard the garage door opening. The blue car backed out. With a roar, the car disappeared down the block. Shari glanced at her clock. It was close to ten o'clock.

She continued watching the house but it was in darkness. No one turned on the light in the upper bedroom again. Finally she yawned. Tomorrow, she thought. I'll think about it tomorrow. I must find out who lives in that house, she promised herself. One of the other kids may know. She wasn't even aware that she was committing herself to make friends with the kids on her block.

Chapter 2

The next day Shari got up early and did her chores. If her mother was surprised by her new spirit of cooperation, she did not show it. Shari was really disappointed that her mother didn't at least give her some praise. Didn't her mother realize the effort she was making to be nice? However, Shari had no thought of sulking again - no way. One silent meal was enough. At about nine-thirty she saw Melissa and Melody outside. Shari hurriedly turned to her mother.

"Mom? Can I go outside?" she asked.

"Sure, Shari," her mother said. Shari could hear the astonishment in her tone.

"Hi," Shari said, crossing the street to greet the two girls. They were again in skirts.

"Hi," Melissa replied. Neither she nor her sister commented on Shari's abrupt departure the day before.

"Where are the others?" Shari asked.

"Shawn, Indy and Rosad ... they've gone upstate for the day." Melissa said. "I think they went to a park. Shawn said it was far. It will take nearly two hours to reach the place. They left early this morning and won't be back until late tonight." She paused then added, "I wish we could go somewhere too."

"Oh." Shari said. "Couldn't your parents take you somewhere too?"

"Our parents are dead."

"Oh." Shari said again, without any inflection. She didn't know what else to say.

There was a short silence, then Melissa continued. "They died in a car crash three years ago."

"So, who do you live with?"

"Our grandparents. They are nice but they don't want to go anywhere."

Melody nodded in agreement. "Gramps has a bad back and Grandma is always fussing that outside is too cold ... even in the summer. We never even get to go to the beach. But I remember our parents took us to a park once."

Melissa frowned. "What park?"

"Starlight Park. It's not far."

"Oh, now I remember." Melissa smiled. "But that was years ago." She turned to Shari. "Is your mother taking you anywhere? Can we come?"

Shari was beginning to realize that she was not the only one with problems. At least she still

had her mother. And imagine never once going to the beach! "Maybe," she suggested tentatively, "I could ask my mother, and the next time we go out, you two could come."

Both Melissa and Melody looked delighted. "Would you?" Melissa asked.

"Sure," Shari said. "Will your grandparents let you?"

"I think they will," Melissa was almost hopping in excitement. "Oh, this is great!"

Melody was grinning. "Are you going anywhere soon?"

"I'll ask my Mom," Shari promised. She then changed the subject. "What about Al? Did he go out too?"

"He'll probably be outside later." Melissa said. "You won't forget to ask your mom will you?"

"I won't." Shari assured her. "Do you have a jump rope? We could play jump rope but my rope broke." Actually she couldn't find it. She didn't even remember packing it, so it could still be in California.

Melissa nodded. "I'll go in and get mine."

Melissa got her rope and they played in front of Shari's house. It did not take long for Shari to discover that while Melody was sweet and followed everything Melissa said, Melissa was bossy, liked her own way and did not like getting advice. After their third argument over who should do what, or where and how they should do it, Shari tried distracting her. She asked Melissa about the neglected house across the street.

"An old lady lives there," Melissa told her.

"An old white lady," Melody added.

"The place looks awfully quiet," Shari said.

Melissa nodded. "I hardly ever see her come out and we've been living here for three years now."

"Since our parents died," Melody said.

"I think she is sick or something," Melissa

continued. "Al has seen her more times. And Shawn and the others say they sometimes see her. They say she used to come out often, but that was years ago. She used to water her garden."

Shari looked across at the overgrown weeds that now made up the front garden. "But who takes care of her."

"She has a ... nurse ... I think." Melissa said. "A lady comes and goes every day."

"I saw a man and a woman upstairs last night," Shari said.

Melissa frowned. "No man lives there. Maybe you saw the nurse. She is tall and has blond hair. It's long."

"That may be her. But I saw a man as well." Shari described what she saw both nights.

Melissa was frowning even before she finished. "How much money was it?"

"I'd need binoculars to check. But it was lots. There were piles of paper money, you know, like how the bank keeps it. It was scattered on a box or something and they were counting it."

"I've seen that car too," Melody said. "It was one night long ago."

"How come you didn't say anything?" Melissa accused.

"'Cause I didn't think it was anything." Melody defended.

"What happened?" Shari asked.

"I couldn't see from my house. It was real late 'cause I only got up to use the bathroom. I just saw the car drive in and drive away."

"I wonder who the man is? Let's go knock on her door and ask if she needs any help," Shari suggested.

"I don't think..." Melissa was clearly reluctant.

"She is old and she may need help after the

nurse leaves. Besides, there is nothing wrong with trying to help out. Come on. The whole thing sounds weird to me."

"I don't think we should get involved with them." Melissa protested. "And if they are crooks, I don't even want to know about it."

"Well I am going even if you aren't." Shari started across the street.

Melissa and Melody caught up with her at the door. After the third ring, the bell was answered by a young lady. She was just as Melissa had described.

"What do you want?" she asked brusquely.

"Hi. I am Shari and this is Melissa and Melody," Shari began. "We just wanted to know if we could help out in any way. I live across the street and Melissa and Melody live just up the block."

"Thanks, but no thanks," the lady said. "I don't need any help." She started to close the door.

"Could I speak to the older lady? Since she is alone at nights, maybe she could use some help." Shari gave the lady her biggest smile.

"Listen, girl. I'm her home attendant and I give her all the help she needs. She doesn't need a bunch of kids bothering her. You hear me?" This time the lady did not wait for an answer. She slammed shut the door.

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